

Early in the Choice Program, many veterans were discouraged because of the bureaucracy and paperwork associated with Choice. Providers then were not often paid in a timely fashion, and they became discouraged by the program. In recent months, that confidence in the program had returned as veterans were beginning to get their care at home, and providers were being paid for the services that they provided veterans. Now, if the third-party administrators—the network—go away, we will send one more message to veterans and to those who wish to serve them—the healthcare community—that the program is not a viable or a valuable one.

Fortunately, both the House and Senate have been working to fix this situation. Since June, my colleagues on the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee have joined me in working to find a solution that protects access to community care for veterans. The Choice Program is funded by mandatory spending. We have also been working with the House as they have tried to develop a solution that maintains Choice and that is fiscally responsible.

There has been a lot of back and forth, a lot of conversation, a lot of talk, and a lot of negotiations going on, and I support the efforts of our chairmen and ranking members of the Veterans' Affairs Committees, both in the House and Senate, who are trying to work on an agreement to come together for our Nation's veterans. I would hope and I expect that a bill will come from the House yet this week.

My point to my colleagues here today is that we do not have the luxury of then trying to figure out something different to do than what the House sends us. We need to have our plan in place, and we need to have something that can pass both the House and Senate in the next 2 days. I want to motivate my colleagues to do what is right for veterans and set aside the differences that have prevented the necessary cooperation to see that we have one bill that can pass both the House and Senate and save Choice.

I stood here in 2014 to implore my colleagues to support the passage of the Choice Act in the first place, and I stand here again today to implore my colleagues to come together and support the passage of this critical funding for the continuation of the Choice Program and community care for veterans. I am here to make certain that we end the delays and find a way to understand the differences and accept that we must act quickly on behalf of veterans. It has to happen immediately. We owe our veterans better than what we have been providing them.

I am, once again, partnering with the Senator whom I honored in my opening comments—Senator MCCAIN—and others to introduce legislation that will put funds back into the Choice Program and make sure that our veterans do not experience a lapse of care at home or a termination of the program.

We are working hard with our colleagues across the aisle and in the House to determine the future of this program and what community care will look like. While we work to create that system that will serve future generations of veterans for years to come—how we make Choice better—we cannot allow the program to expire at this critical point in time. Taking care of veterans must be a priority above any one specific “ask” or “must have” in the funding. Not acting is not an option.

Upon his return to the Senate, Senator MCCAIN's words remind us of the importance of this task and many others before us. I am honored to work with him on this effort to save Choice and to serve our veterans. I ask my colleagues to help us save this important program that benefits rural and urban veterans, that makes care more timely, that provides care in the circumstances in which the VA does not have the capabilities, either in a timely or a quality fashion, to provide the services to veterans.

This does not diminish the role or necessity of the Department of Veterans Affairs or their hospitals and clinics across the country. Veterans continue to use VA hospitals, and they continue to use our outpatient clinics, but we ought not allow for the elimination of the third opportunity for veterans' care—the Choice Program—that serves so many veterans in so many communities.

Again, I thank Senator MCCAIN for his leadership and his bipartisan work that originally created this program—this opportunity—with Senator SANDERS.

We seek bipartisanship to put veterans first and to put their healthcare access above everything else. I am urging my colleagues today to know that this issue exists, not to walk away from it, to make certain that we accomplish our goals, and that this critical funding be provided before we depart for the weekend.

Preserving this important benefit honors our heroes—Senator Dole, Senator MCCAIN, and the thousands of Americans who did not ask about whether it was Republicans who served the country or Democrats who served the country. They are those who believe that having served their country is what motivated them to see that their families were safe and secure and to see that America had a bright future. We ought not deny them that kind of service today.

Madam President, I thank you for the opportunity to address the Senate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

WOUNDED OFFICERS RECOVERY ACT OF 2017

Mr. FLAKE. Madam President, I come to the floor to pass the Wounded Officers Recovery Act. This legislation comes after last month's terrible

shooting at the Republican practice for the annual Congressional Baseball Game.

As many of you already know, U.S. Capitol Police DPD Special Agents Crystal Griner and David Bailey were both wounded in the line of duty as they successfully fought off and subdued the gunman. I witnessed firsthand the unbelievable bravery and heroism of the Capitol Police on that morning. It is not at all an exaggeration to say that, if not for their actions, I probably would not be here today.

I and my colleagues certainly have a special place in our hearts for them and an appreciation for what they did on that fateful morning. It is a privilege to be able to help them out now. They had our backs, and now we need to have theirs.

This bill amends the policies of the United States Capitol Police Memorial Fund to expand eligibility to include any U.S. Capitol Police employee who has been injured in the line of duty. This will enable Special Agents Griner and Bailey to access funds raised for victims of the congressional baseball practice shooting.

Previously, the fund only allowed donated funds to be given to the families of officers killed in the line of duty. I am hopeful all of my colleagues will agree that this issue should rise above any partisan wrangling.

Special Agents Crystal Griner and David Bailey have our gratitude, and we ought to be able to help them. I am grateful for their sacrifice. I hope we can speak with one voice in support of the brave men and women of the Capitol Police and pass this bill without delay.

I wish to thank the cosponsors here in the Senate, including Senator PAUL, Senator DONNELLY, Senator MURPHY, and all of those who played in the congressional baseball game, also, in the House, the managers of the Republican and the Democratic teams respectively, Joe Martin and MIKE DOYLE.

The congressional baseball game is one of the best institutions in Congress, one of the most bipartisan institutions. We are able to raise a lot of money for needy causes as well as the Capitol Police. We want to make sure a lot of the money that was raised this year—a portion of that money—can go to these deserving individuals who helped us out in a very real way and saved our lives.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Rules be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 3298 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the bill by title. The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 3298) to authorize the Capitol Police Board to make payments from the United States Capitol Police Memorial Fund to employees of the United States Capitol Police who have sustained serious line-of-duty injuries, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. FLAKE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Flake amendment at the desk be considered and agreed to; that the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time and passed; and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The amendment (No. 409) in the nature of a substitute was agreed to, as follows:

(Purpose: In the nature of a substitute)

Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the following:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Wounded Officers Recovery Act of 2017”.

SEC. 2. PAYMENTS FROM UNITED STATES CAPITOL POLICE MEMORIAL FUND FOR EMPLOYEES KILLED IN THE LINE OF DUTY OR SUSTAINING SERIOUS LINE-OF-DUTY INJURIES.

(a) AUTHORIZING PAYMENTS FROM FUND.—Section 2 of Public Law 105–223 (2 U.S.C. 1952) is amended—

(1) in the section heading, by inserting “AND CERTAIN OTHER UNITED STATES CAPITOL POLICE EMPLOYEES” before the period at the end;

(2) by striking “Subject to the regulations” and inserting “(a) IN GENERAL.—Except to the extent used or reserved for use under subsection (b) and subject to the regulations”; and

(3) by adding at the end the following new subsection:

“(b) PAYMENTS FOR EMPLOYEES KILLED IN THE LINE OF DUTY OR SUSTAINING SERIOUS LINE-OF-DUTY INJURIES.—In addition to the amounts paid under subsection (a), and in accordance with the regulations issued under section 4(b), amounts in the Fund may be paid to—

“(1) families of employees of the United States Capitol Police who were killed in the line of duty; or

“(2) employees of the United States Capitol Police who have sustained serious line-of-duty injuries.”.

(b) REGULATIONS OF CAPITOL POLICE BOARD.—Section 4 of Public Law 105–223 (2 U.S.C. 1954) is amended—

(1) by striking “The Capitol Police Board” and inserting “(a) IN GENERAL.—The Capitol Police Board”; and

(2) by adding at the end the following new subsection:

“(b) REGULATIONS GOVERNING PAYMENTS FOR EMPLOYEES KILLED IN THE LINE OF DUTY OR SUSTAINING SERIOUS LINE-OF-DUTY INJURIES.—In carrying out subsection (a), the Capitol Police Board shall issue specific regulations governing the use of the Fund for making payments to families of employees of the United States Capitol Police who were killed in the line of duty and employees of the United States Capitol Police who have sustained serious line-of-duty injuries (as authorized under section 2(b)), including regulations—

“(1) establishing the conditions under which the family of an employee or an employee is eligible to receive such a payment;

“(2) providing for the amount, timing, and manner of such payments; and

“(3) ensuring that any such payment is in addition to, and does not otherwise affect, any other form of compensation payable to the family of an employee or the employee, including benefits for workers’ compensation

under chapter 81 of title 5, United States Code.”.

(c) TREATMENT OF AMOUNTS RECEIVED IN RESPONSE TO INCIDENT OF JUNE 14, 2017.—The second sentence of section 1 of Public Law 105–223 (2 U.S.C. 1951) is amended by striking “deposit into the Fund” and inserting “deposit into the Fund, including amounts received in response to the shooting incident at the practice for the Congressional Baseball Game for Charity on June 14, 2017.”.

The amendment was ordered to be engrossed and the bill to be read a third time.

The bill was read the third time.

The bill (H.R. 3298), as amended, was passed.

AMERICAN HEALTH CARE ACT OF 2017—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I want all my colleagues and everyone listening right now to be very clear about what Republican leadership is planning for today. Faced with defeat after defeat on their plans to rip apart our healthcare system—“no” on a bill that would spike families’ premiums, gut Medicaid, and deny 22 million people healthcare; “no” on a bill that would cause chaos and healthcare costs to skyrocket and deny 32 million people healthcare—it appears the Republican leader has a last-ditch plan waiting in the wings.

As soon as they have an official score from the CBO—which could be hours from now—in the dead of night, Senator MCCONNELL will bring forward legislation that Democrats, patients, families, and even many Senate Republicans have not seen, and try to pass it before anyone can so much as blink.

Now, we have heard rumors about what could be in this bill, and based on what we know, Democrats took it upon ourselves to do the best we could to figure out what its impact will be. The CBO scored our best guess at what Republicans are talking about doing, and here is what they found: Sixteen million people will lose their healthcare coverage in the next 10 years under this bill; premiums will increase by 20 percent every single year for the next 10 years; your premiums will increase 20 percent every single year in the next 10 years, all while special interests in the healthcare industry are going to get a massive tax break.

Republicans could still play games with the language as they negotiate in secret somewhere to try to get a bit “better” than this, but no matter what they do here, if they jam it through, they will be held accountable for the millions of people who lose care and the millions and millions more who will see their premiums go up.

I hope, when my Senate Republican colleagues began their process, they were not planning to pass a bill in the dark of night to deny millions of people healthcare and hand special interests billions in tax breaks, but, right now, that is the path they are careening

down—even as more and more people are speaking up about what the impact of this legislation would have.

In fact, just yesterday, a bipartisan group of 10 Governors wrote a letter urging Senate Republicans to reject this secret bill, saying it would—I am quoting 10 bipartisan Governors—“accelerate health plans leaving the individual market, increase premiums, and result in fewer Americans having access to coverage.”

I hope every single Senate Republican read that letter.

I also hope they understand that if they pass this bill tonight, it will only get worse from here. If this secret bill—the lowest common denominator—goes through and a conference starts with the House, then every Senate Republican who voted for it has just bought TrumpCare a trip to the White House. The Senate Republicans who so loudly made clear they hated the TrumpCare bill when it passed the House could now very well find themselves being held responsible for sending that same bill straight to President Trump’s desk because, let’s be honest, extreme conservatives aren’t going to rest until they have a bill on the way to the White House that would spike premiums and out-of-pocket costs, gut protections for preexisting conditions, end Medicaid as we know it, defund Planned Parenthood, and kick tens of millions of people off their coverage—a bill that would, in other words, shatter the promises of more responsible Republicans who I know are deeply concerned about ways these outcomes would impact the people they serve.

So, to put it simply, a bill in conference is no excuse to kick people off coverage, spike premiums by 20 percent for everyone, and give a massive tax break to the wealthy, especially because it will simply be an opportunity to hand the keys over to the House Freedom Caucus.

I want to remind any Senate Republican who doesn’t want to have TrumpCare on their hands—who truly does want to make our healthcare system work better for patients and families—there is a better path. As Senator MCCAIN said so powerfully earlier this week, we shouldn’t let the “bombastic loudmouths” drive our work. We should get back to regular order, and we still can.

I am saying to every Senate Republican every chance I get: Drop this partisan, sham floor process. Drop it. Start over with an open, transparent process in which both sides, patients, and families across the country have a voice.

I hope that as big as our differences are, many of my Republican colleagues would prefer that bipartisan voice and route. They have said as much. Their votes to reject the partisan TrumpCare and full repeal bills this week made it even clearer.

So let’s have hearings like Chairman ALEXANDER has proposed to do in our HELP Committee. Let’s have a public